United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/892
17 May 1991

FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General appeals for further $168 million for victims of Bangladesh cyclone; United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator to establish immediately Inter-Agency Task Force to formulate with Bangladesh Government report on rehabilitation and reconstruction.

- Special Commission to oversee destruction of Iraq's weapons begins on-site verification activities in the country.

- Economic and Social Council hears speakers call for continuing sanctions against South Africa.

- Germany contributes $5.8 million to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Gulf assistance.

* * *

Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar today launched a special emergency appeal for $168 million for the victims of the Bangladesh cyclone and the most immediate requirements which had not yet been covered. So far, the Government has received $250 million in bilateral and multilateral assistance.

In a statement issued at Headquarters this afternoon, the Secretary-General said he had asked the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator immediately to establish an Inter-Agency Task Force, composed of concerned organizations of the United Nations system. The Task Force would begin its work this week in Dhaka in order to formulate with the Government a consolidated report on medium-to long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The report is to be presented to the international community at a meeting in July in Geneva, within the framework of the forthcoming session of Economic and Social Council.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

At a press briefing in Geneva on Tuesday, the UNDRO Coordinator, M'Hamed Essaafi, urged the international community to provide more assistance to Bangladesh, saying: "Bangladesh cannot manage on its own and massive external assistance is required."

Back from his mission to Bangladesh, Mr. Essaafi reported that over 2 million survivors were in immediate need of drinking water, food, shelter and medical assistance. Altogether, 9.8 million people were affected by the cyclone, according to government estimates, he said.

While the provisions of relief goods was of the utmost urgency, helicopters and small boats were required just as promptly to ensure the effective distribution of the supplies, Mr. Essaafi said. The Bangladesh authorities had estimated emergency assistance needs at $665 million, and total aid requirements, including rehabilitation and reconstruction, at $1.4 billion, the Disaster Relief Coordinator said.

The agency reported that, based on the assessment made so far by the Government of Bangladesh, 138,000 people were known to have lost their lives, and an equal number had been injured; 780,000 homes had been totally destroyed; over 1 million livestock had been killed; hundreds of thousands of acres of crops had been destroyed, hundreds of miles of roads and embankments had been washed away and thousands of boats had been lost. Almost 50,000 people were already suffering from diarrhoeal diseases brought about by polluted water and malnutrition.

* * *

A United Nations official told correspondents today that the Special Commission set up by the Security Council to monitor the destruction or rendering harmless of Iraq's weapons systems had been active in the country since Tuesday when a team of 34 people arrived in Baghdad.

He said the team had visited a nuclear research facility about 30 kilometres north of Baghdad where there are two research reactors. The area had been subjected to substantial bombing by the allied forces during the Gulf war.

Yesterday, the team had a planning day in Baghdad, based on their initial survey of the site, and today they went back to the site with explosive ordnance disposal personel and a radiation protection team, the official said.

He said it was not known how long the nuclear inspection team would be in Iraq on this its first verification mission, although an initial estimate was about one week. He added that the Special Commission was expected to send a second verification team to Iraq later this month in connection with chemical weapons.

* * *

(more)

Calls for the United Nations to proclaim a third, and, hopefully, final Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination were heard this morning as the Economic and Social Council began consideration of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Second Decade.

Speakers stressed the importance of maintaining sanctions against South Africa until apartheid had been totally dismantled, and urged further action to deal with problems of discrimination faced by ethnic minorities and migrant workers.

In an introductory statement, Jan Martenson, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights, said that although progress had been made in efforts to ensure the equal rights of all, it was distressing that discrimination still affected many millions of people throughout the world.

Among the speakers, the representative of Morocco, Halima E. Warzazi, said the results of the Decade had so far been unsatisfactory. She blamed the paucity of resources which she said blocked progress.

She went on to say that the rise of the extreme right fed on racism and the rejection of immigrants. Such racism was even expressed in video games. The Austrian Minister of Education had called for an end to video games called "Total Auschwitz" and "Hitler Dictator No. 1" which featured torture and concentration camps. The scourge of racism and racial discrimination must be eradicated from the world, and a third Decade would be necessary towards that end, she said.

* * *

Germany has pledged $5.8 million for United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-assisted emergency interventions in southern Iraq -- the largest contribution for this emergency programme to date.

The UNICEF said in a press release yesterday that with this pledge it had received a total of $13 million to assist children and women caught in the aftermath of the Gulf war. The overall needs for UNICEF-supported interventions in Iraq total $25 million.

* *** *